



**Geneva Centre for the
Democratic Control
of Armed Forces (DCAF)**



**Palestinian Council on
Foreign Relations (PCFR)**

**‘MOVING FORWARD OR BACKWARD: GOOD
PALESTINIAN SECURITY SECTOR GOVERNANCE OR
ACCELERATED TRIBALIZATION’**

Khan Younis, Gaza Strip, Palestinian Territories

3 May 2007

SUMMARY REPORT

1. Introduction

The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) and the Palestinian Council on Foreign Relations (PCFR) on 3 May 2007 organised a workshop in Khan Younis, Gaza Strip, to discuss the current state of Palestinian security sector governance in the light of Palestinian public perceptions. Based on the findings of DCAF’s public perception studies in the Palestinian territories, the workshop aimed to give Palestinian civil society, political parties and security officials a platform for discussing the challenges and obstacles to sustainable Palestinian security sector reform. The event was attended by more than 40 representatives of the security forces, the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), the judiciary, political factions, local authorities, civil society and the media.

Over the past months, the security situation in the Palestinian territories has continued to deteriorate: Rising crime, clashes between political factions and the spread of weapons have led to increasing insecurity, in particular in the Gaza Strip. Despite the formation of the Palestinian national unity government in March 2007, the international financial and diplomatic boycott of the PNA government has remained largely in place. The PNA is still struggling to pay the salaries of its employees. Palestinian official institutions have not recovered from the re-orientation of donor support to *ad-hoc* mechanisms and have been unable to resume the level of activity prior to the boycott. In parallel to this process of de-institutionalisation, the international boycott, coupled with the Israeli closure regime, has resulted in increasing economic hardship for the Palestinian population. Especially the Gaza Strip is experiencing unseen socioeconomic deprivation and internal disorder. On the political level, the clashes of Winter 2006/2007 paved the way for a factional understanding between Hamas and Fateh, embodied in the Mecca Agreement of February 2007. However, tensions between both movements remain and continue to be fought out in the streets, albeit on a lower level.

Against this background, the DCAF-PCFR workshop meant to provide a forum for Palestinian security stakeholders to discuss the implications of the current political and socioeconomic situation in Gaza for security sector governance and reform. DCAF and PCFR decided to hold the event in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip, an area particularly affected by the deterioration of security. Thereby the workshop aimed to increase the involvement of civil society at the community level and to give the Palestinian public a stronger say in the management and governance of their security sector. The event took place under rather adverse security conditions. This was underlined by a killing which occurred at the same time and in the immediate vicinity of the workshop.

2. Transparency and Accountability: Key Concepts of Good Security Sector Governance

Roland Friedrich, DCAF Representative in Palestine, gave a conceptual overview on security sector reform and presented some of the results of DCAF's monitoring of Palestinian public perceptions on security sector governance and reform. Roland Friedrich introduced the concept of security sector reform which he described as the "transformation of security institutions and mechanisms so that they play an effective, legitimate and democratically accountable role in providing security to the people." According to Mr. Friedrich, the ultimate goal of SSR was to effectively and efficiently provide human and state security in a framework of democratic governance. Mr. Friedrich explained that DCAF understood the security sector in a broad and holistic sense: It included the armed and security forces as well as non-state security actors such as insurgency groups or liberation movements, the civil management and oversight structures such as the Executive, Parliament and the Judiciary, but also civil society and the broader legal and societal framework.

Roland Friedrich then briefly summarised the key findings of the latest DCAF/IUED report (2006) on Palestinian public perceptions of security sector governance. Mr. Friedrich said that the Palestinians had trust in the security forces but that law-enforcement could do better: 62% of the respondents in the DCAF/IUED survey were unhappy with the performance of the security forces in fighting corruption, 57% with

the performance in preventing violence against women, and 54% with the performance in preventing damage to property. He explained that public trust in the Palestinian armed factions remained high: More than 70% of the Palestinians trusted the military wings of the factions very much or to some extent; 79% of the respondents in the poll trusted the Izzedin al-Qassam Brigades, 78% trusted the Al-Quds Brigades, and 76% trusted the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades.

Mr. Friedrich went on to explain that the Palestinian public had a strong demand for more accountability and oversight of the PNA security forces. 95% of the Palestinians wanted tighter control of the security forces by the government and the President, and 89% demanded increased oversight by the PLC.

Mr. Friedrich added that the data revealed a strong preference for more effective and efficient security forces. According to the poll, 92% of the Palestinians attached great importance to the unification of the security forces, the improvement of training standards and increased human rights-training for security personnel. Mr. Friedrich contrasted this with the lack of support for the reduction of security personnel, which a majority of 61% of the respondents considered unimportant. He also said that the Palestinian public wanted more accountability on the forces level: 85% of the respondents considered fighting corruption and nepotism in the security forces very important, and 79% said that the persecution of security personnel responsible for human-rights violations was necessary. Mr. Friedrich added that a large majority of 89% wished that the PNA collected illegal weapons; likewise, 88% supported the integration of the armed wings of the factions into the security forces.

Mr. Friedrich concluded his presentation by drawing attention to the negative perception of the Western donor community. He stated that only 16% of the Palestinian public trusted security sector reform advice and assistance from the US and Canada. The European Union, Mr. Friedrich explained, fared only slightly better with a trust-level of 31%. In contrast to this, he said, 73% of the public trusted advice and assistance by non-Arab Muslim countries.

3. Improving Security Sector Governance in Gaza – The View of the Palestinian Security Forces

Major-General Tawfiq Jaber, Director-General for Public Relations of the Civil Police in Gaza, gave an analysis of the security situation in the Gaza Strip and the state of Palestinian security sector reform. General Jaber presented a rather grim picture and cautioned that the Palestinian National Authority was working under difficult conditions which could not be compared to other contexts:

We have a security earthquake here. The responsibilities shouldered by the security forces are very heavy and unlike in any other country. We have high levels of murder, thefts, and attacks on public properties. And we have Israeli incursions and attacks. We have a severe deterioration on all fronts.

General Jaber adverted that the continuing security chaos in Gaza has led to a situation where the family or the tribe have become for many individuals the primary security providers. Families and tribes were emerging as the strongest actor in the Gaza Strip, a process that negatively affected the security forces:

The families become stronger and stronger. People are attacking the Police, people from society. There is lack of interest in the role and performance of the security forces from society.

General Jaber was highly critical of the role of Israel and the International Community. He explained that the on-going Israeli control of the access to the Gaza Strip and Israeli military operations not only made the building of effective security forces difficult, but also negatively affected economic development and social cohesion: “We would like to see our security forces in a better shape, but in reality we are still under occupation. And the Israeli policies focus on destroying the basis of society.” According to General Jaber, the international boycott had an equally detrimental affect:

The International Community plays a negative role. We wanted to unify our work and efforts to cope with the situation. We have a double standard imposed on us by the White House. And even when we have realistic demands, we just get things on paper.

General Jaber went on to say that the international position vis-à-vis the Palestinians opened the door for regional interference: “We have others manipulating our situation. This affects our struggle and policies.”

General Jaber underlined that the PNA was willing to continue with the security sector reform process. He said that the PNA was working on establishing law and order, but needed more support: “We have ideas how to reform the security forces, but we need more activities, more debate, and for this we need better conditions.” General Jaber called upon the European states for a greater engagement in Palestinian security sector reform: “We want the Europeans to assume their role.”

Lieutenant-Colonel Nawaf As-Salmi, Director of Public Relations of the National Security Forces in Gaza, presented an analysis from the perspective of the National Security Forces. When trying to understand the security situation in Gaza, Lieutenant Colonel As-Salmi explained, it was important to take into account the destruction of the Palestinian security infrastructure by Israel during the second Intifada. The National Security Forces had simply lost the capabilities that they had enjoyed before 2000:

We are well-trained, but our capacities are destroyed. We have destroyed headquarters, destroyed communications infrastructure, destroyed vehicles. How do you want me to act in this situation? It is not a matter of 80.000 security personnel, we simply don't have the means and capacities.

According to Lieutenant-Colonel As-Salmi, the destruction of the Palestinian security capacities by Israel also had a very negative effect on the morale of Palestinian security personnel: “What can we do? Do you want us to sit on the border with Israel and Egypt and wait until the Israeli airplanes destroy us again?” The destruction of security capacities was also a key factor with regard to the rise of militant groups in Gaza over the past years: “The attacks on us and our installations – that is the reason why the resistance emerged so strong.”

4. Improving Security Sector Governance in Gaza – The View of Civil Society

Dr. Mariam Abu Dakka, a civil society activist from Khan Younis, analysed the security situation and the implications for the reform process from the perspective of civil society. Dr. Abu Dakka underlined that security was the key issue in Gaza. She also congratulated the organisers for convening this workshop in Khan Younis. She concurred with the view that the destruction of the Palestinian security capacities and the ongoing Israeli control over the access to Gaza was one of the main reasons for the severe deterioration of law and order in the Gaza Strip: “We should not forget that the occupation is still the reference. The infrastructure of the security forces are still being destroyed.” In addition to that, Dr. Abu Dakka emphasised that poor salaries or their complete suspension impacted strongly on the security forces’ performance and contributed to the general socioeconomic decline in Gaza:

A soldier or policeman used to get 200 Dollars a month. Now he is lucky if he gets anything at all. People in Gaza do not have enough money to buy even basic food ingredients. Under these conditions, how can a security officer train, how can he work? A soldier feels that his weapon cannot even protect himself. He is under international boycott, he cannot even protect himself. How is he supposed to protect others?

Dr. Abu Dakka went on to explain that the family was becoming the main source of protection for the individual, at the expense of all other social groups:

The situation is no longer a matter of Hamas, Fateh or PFLP. It is about families and tribes. Splits in the country are getting deeper, and the Palestinian cause is becoming second to the family. People are going back to the family because there is no state. But if the situation continues like this, the security chaos will also destroy the cohesion of the tribes and families.

With regard to the security sector reform process, Dr. Abu Dakka laid out that the increasing politicisation of the security establishment was a dangerous development:

When the government changes, when the power is transferred, the security forces are supposed to stay neutral. They are meant for the service of the country. This did not happen. Then the Hamas government created the Executive Force. What will happen if a new faction emerges, will we have a new force?

Dr. Abu Dakka adverted that the security forces were still following individuals, rather than the institutions: “At the moment, the security forces are each allied with one or another figure. We need to reform this mentality and culture.”

Dr. Abu Dakka then explained that the only way out of the crisis was real political will to reform and to develop a common strategy for reform and security sector governance:

The main thing is political will. If there is political will, the forces could be unified and reformed. What we need is the elimination of factionalism, politically and socially. We need one army loyal to the people, not the family or the faction.

Pointing at the important role that civil society had to play in security sector reform, Dr. Abu Dakka called upon NGOs and community organisations to get involved more in the Palestinian debate on security:

We all know our problem. The responsibility for the chaos is on the shoulders of the decision-makers as well as on everybody else. Civil society needs to pressure the security sector to unify forces, to increase their professionalism, and to defend our rights.

According to Dr. Abu Dakka, it was also crucial to work on the education of security personnel:

We need to educate a new generation of security personnel. A generation must develop that does not follow the leader but the institution. We need to give an example here. In Arabic we have a proverb saying: "As the father, so the son." We need more such workshops. Events like this should have taken place much earlier.

Dr. Abu Dakka also called for more surveys on security: "We need more surveys and reports. If there is good analysis, decision-making will be better." Another priority was to strengthen the Palestinian Judiciary to prevent the citizens from resorting to informal mechanisms of conflict resolution. Finally, Dr. Abu Dakka joined the previous speakers in calling for more European aid and support.

5. Discussion

During the following discussion, participants gave a grim picture of the security and socioeconomic situation in the Gaza Strip and the results of the international financial and economic boycott. Participants emphasised that the conditions in Gaza had deteriorated to the degree that food and economic security had become the main concern of the people. As a PLC member from Khan Younis explained:

We do not only have a problem with physical security. Now it is about even more basic needs. We have a lack of food in many areas. The individual is looking for ways to survive. People do not have the most basic security in terms of food. And with this, how can a security man work if he has no cover, no salary and no food?

A representative of the municipality of Khan Younis described the current situation in the southern Gaza Strip:

Look at the situation here in Khan Younis. We distribute bread as a substitute for salaries. How can we establish security and live democratically if there is no food? The irregular payment of salaries or their complete suspension are leading to a situation where Gazans are increasingly unable to cover their most basic needs. This is the main cause for the security chaos. If a man has no food, he cannot live. People are becoming violent to secure any kind of life for them and their families.

Another participant from Khan Younis concurred with the analysis that daily survival had become the priority in the Gaza Strip: "What are the reasons for the security chaos? It is now the economy and the struggle for survival. The individual needs to have economic security and food security, this is the key priority. Then we can discuss all other elements."

Participants agreed that the socioeconomic situation and the lack of salaries made the work of the security forces extremely difficult, if not impossible. As a representative of the National Security Forces said: “The situation here has become so bad. I want to establish law and order, but how can I do that if I don’t even have money to pay the landlord?” The other participants showed understanding for the difficult conditions under which the security forces were working. A PLC member from Khan Younis said that the security forces had long been criticised for their performance. But, under the current conditions it was almost impossible for security officers to assume their responsibilities:

Since 1996 we have been criticising and attacking the security forces. I am not defending them, but the situation now is different. A policeman does not have money to provide food for his family. How will he react then if his unit is attacked and his colleagues killed?

Throughout the discussion, participants were highly critical of the policies of the international community and the economic and financial boycott of the Palestinian government. Various participants said that the international community had a direct responsibility for the deterioration of the security situation in Gaza and the West Bank. As one participant explained: “First, Israel destroyed the capacities of the security forces, and now the international community destroys the whole concept of security in Palestine.” Another participant asked: “Why can the world not simply let us live the way we want to?” Also, participants saw the current mechanisms of international aid as misguided and insufficient:

Let’s be clear here: Donors play a very negative role. Instead of real support, outside actors focus on aid that does not meet our real needs. At least 70 percent of the donor support is wasted.

Participants also put great emphasis on the phenomenon of factionalism and the increasing importance of families in the Gaza Strip. Participants remarked that the socioeconomic conditions, the breakdown of law and order and the weakness of the central authority were closely interlinked. This pushed the people to seek protection from factions and families. One participant explained:

The family has replaced the government as the provider of security. In addition to this we have an exaggeration of the concept of factionalism. We have 45 factions in Gaza now. It’s a vicious circle. The role of the family increases at the expense of the government’s one; the government loses strength at the expense of the factions, and the factions are linked to the families.

Participants recognized that limiting the importance of families in the provision of security poses a difficult challenge for the security forces. A participant from Khan Younis compared the current situation to the mid-1990s when the PNA had still had the capacities and the authority to control families and tribal groups:

In 1995, when there was a fight between families the security forces intervened and put both parties in prison. Now this is inconceivable.

A representative of the National Security Forces provided a similar assessment: “The tribal spirit is now dominating everything. Once the security forces prevented the families from resorting to arms, now we simply cannot do it.” Another participant drew

a comparison to the first Intifada: “In 1987, during the first Intifada, when the Unified National Leadership entered any neighbourhood, nobody would dare to resist. Now we have huge security forces and they cannot arrest even one criminal.” In response to this, a representative of the National Security Forces commented the constraints under which the security forces were operating:

The security forces are asked bigger things than they can do. True, we have 80.000 members over 7000 km². But in the end we don't have the capacities to develop our performance and assume our tasks. And in the end the 7000 km² are under effective Israeli control.

The participants of the workshop made a number of recommendations how to proceed with Palestinian security sector reform and the establishment of law and order. Participants agreed that the improvement of the living conditions of the citizens had to be a top priority. For this, the end of the international economic boycott of the PNA government and other authorities was crucial. A representative of Khan Younis municipality urged:

The boycott has to be lifted. We need economic and food security. Otherwise we cannot work.

Another participant put it more directly:

The US is working against us. The world has to realise this. We need effective aid and support.

Secondly, participants emphasised the need for political will to stabilise the security situation and push ahead with security reforms. There was a shared view that the Palestinian political decision-makers were not acting according to what the security situation demanded. As one participant put it: “The security forces are a mess because of the lack of political will to establish law and order and to undertake reforms. Now we are seeing the results.” Other participants agreed:

The security forces can improve their performance, but the decision-makers need to give clear orders. The political level is the problem. Without political will, there will be no progress.

In this context, participants called for increased political dialogue between the factions. In the lights of the requirements of the situation in the Gaza Strip, such dialogue had to focus on the definition of security as well as on achieving effective political partnership:

The solution lies in politics. There are many problems in the security forces, that's true, but in the end it is about political will. This also means that we have to address the increasing confusion between resistance and the work of the security organisations. We need to make distinctions here and reach a consensus.

Although participants showed some disagreements on the role of resistance in the framework of a national security policy, there was a shared understanding that this should not hinder a meaningful dialogue on the definition of a concept of security:

There is a potential for political cooperation. We can talk to each other. Even during the clashes in January people managed to talk. That shows that there is room for working together. We need to continue in the spirit of Mecca.

We need real political partnership. We have formed a national unity government, now we need to unify all factions and define a strategy of security.

Participants also saw political will as important for re-establishing the authority of the PNA vis-à-vis the families and tribes. As one participant stated, the role of families could be limited if there was a central political decision to do so:

The families in Gaza have political cover, and they need to be cut off from their support. If there is political will and political cover, families no longer will be able to dominate.

Moreover, there was wide agreement that the security forces had to be unified and de-politicised. Participants reiterated that it was crucial to remove the security forces from political interference. Therefore a political decision was needed to “separate and isolate the security forces from the factions. They must be only subordinate to the highest political will.”

Participants generally underlined the importance of institution-building. Participants agreed that democracy was based on the strength of institutions and the law and that both had been suffering severely in the Palestinian context, especially in the Gaza Strip. In this context, effective partnership and cooperation between all institutions involved in security sector governance was required:

The security chaos is also a result of the lack of functioning institutions. The President, the Government and the PLC, all need to work together on institutional reform and the reform of the security sector.

Participants also felt the need to establish an effective institutional framework for security-related decision-making: “If we had a clear address for the security forces, many problems would be solved.” Various participants suggested that the recently re-activated National Security Council should assume this function.

Participants further highlighted the need for effective oversight and review structures vis-à-vis the security forces. In particular, participants referred to the importance of strengthening the role of Parliament. “The PLC (Palestinian Legislative Council) needs to assume its work. It has been absent from control and monitoring. It did not ask the previous Minister of Interior about the security situation.” Participants agreed that the PLC had to play a key role in Palestinian security sector governance and reform:

The PLC needs to control and supervise the security forces and their performance, based on the law. That means supervision in terms of restructuring and reforming of the forces, as well as in terms of their actual work.

The building of an effective judiciary was seen as equally crucial:

The Palestinian law is not active, and the judiciary needs protection. We need to strengthen the judiciary and activate the law under one national strategy.

Finally, participants put great emphasis of the role of civil society in security sector governance. There was wide agreement that civil society organisations can play a key role in stabilising the security situation in the Gaza Strip and pushing for sustainable security sector reform. As one participant remarked: “People are completely fed up with the security forces and the factions. Every child is asking how long this situation will continue. This is why civil society needs to be brought in.” Another participant concurred:

We need to strengthen the role of civil society organisations, we need to change the understandings and concepts that are gaining influence in our society. We need civil society organisations to fight the security chaos. And this has to be supported by the highest political level.

Civil society representatives explained that it was important to involve civil society in all security sector reform activities. This referred especially to the newly re-activated National Security Council, which had to establish links with local organisations and civil society.

6. Conclusion

The security and socioeconomic situation in the Gaza Strip is deteriorating at a rapid pace. The combination of lack of regular income for many Palestinians, prolonged Israeli closures of the Gaza Strip and power struggles between the various factions has led to an unprecedented degree of insecurity for the individual. Over the last months, the lack of food security has added additional hardship on the population. All this is resulting in a complete breakdown of law and order in Gaza. It has also facilitated the re-emergence of kinship groups as the main provider of security. Similar processes, albeit to a lesser degree, have been under way in the West Bank. In the perception of Palestinians, the continued international financial boycott of the Palestinian government largely contributes to these developments.

The workshop has illustrated the difficulties of implementing security sector reform under the conditions currently prevailing in the Palestinian territories. It has made clear the close link between security sector governance, domestic politics and the provision of basic security needs. If the current processes are not reversed, they are likely to lastingly undermine Palestinian state-building and result in increasing support for groups which until now have not managed to establish a strong foothold in the Palestinian territories. There exists a clear risk of spillover effects to neighbouring states.

Participants in the workshop presented several recommendations how the trend towards anarchy in the Pt can be reversed and how sustainable security sector reform could be achieved. From a civil society perspective, the Palestinian priorities for the SSR process should be as follows:

- To continue the intra-Palestinian dialogue on security sector governance with the aim of developing a locally-owned security policy that is legitimate and supported by the public. For this, dialogue should take place between the main political factions, but under direct inclusion of civil society.

- To develop a cohesive strategy for re-asserting the monopoly of force for the Palestinian National Authority and for establishing a modicum of stability in the Palestinian territories.
- To undertake serious efforts to depoliticise the Palestinian security sector and unify the Palestinian security forces. This means also finding mechanism and avenues for dealing with newly established security organisations and armed groups.
- To strengthen the role of Palestinian oversight and monitoring institutions, in particular the Palestinian Legislative Council and the Judiciary, and to improve their cooperation with the Executive.
- To strengthen the role of civil society organisations and community representatives in security sector governance and to give them a voice on all policy levels. Especially in Gaza the role of civil society will be crucial in fighting the spreading 'security chaos.'

However, in order to succeed, these efforts require a favourable political and socioeconomic environment. The international community can play a crucial role in this regard. However, key to this is that regional and international actors first accept the political reality in the Palestinian territories. This means also reconsidering their position towards the Hamas movement. Only this will allow coming up with a constructive policy that supports the work of the national unity government. Donor countries should also make sure that:

- Security sector reform assistance in the Palestinian territories is made consistent with the international norms and standards that apply to such assistance.
- International assistance, and particularly assistance to SSR, becomes more depoliticised in order to obtain broader acceptance.
- All development investments are accompanied by investments in structural reforms and institutional development. For this reason, more funds need to be allocated for comprehensive security sector reform assistance.

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